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Developing international partnerships and exchange: initiatives from the Division of Education

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Health, Community and Education Studies

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Biographies

Dr. Michael Jarvis works at Northumbria University in Newcastle upon Tyne, England where he contributes to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Teacher Education and Fine Art.

Michael works as a consultant and researcher in primary and secondary schools. He has formed a primary art teacher network and works on different art & design projects in schools, for example, investigating the mark-making repertoires used by early years children. Michael has published articles in the international Journal of Art and Design Education and the Journal of Visual Arts practice. The most recent of these was entitled *Francis Bacon and the Practice of Painting*, published in the JVAP Volume 8 Number 3, 2009. His doctoral thesis was entitled *The Successive 'Deaths' of Painting*, and explores the different pronouncements made about the supposed 'death' of painting from 1840 to the present time.

Michael is a painter. He has work in many private collections, and has had work commissioned for sites in Newcastle, Hexham, Edinburgh and Livingston.

A critical component of Michael's practice is to analyse how the painter makes and 'performs' a work, and how the viewer can 're-enact' a painting during the active process of looking and reception.

Introduction

In the following report we try to show how our international links and practice in the Division of Education enable students and staff to present a wider perspective on knowledge and pedagogy, in keeping with the notion of the 'global citizen'. Crossley (2002, p.81) argues that the '*impact of intensified globalisation is possibly the most often cited challenge facing the field of comparative and international education at this point in time.*' Henceforth, education can no longer be perceived as a localised, or even national, agenda but rather, that global forces are, '*dramatically changing the role of the state in education, and demanding increased attention to be paid to factors operating beyond the national level*' (Crossley, 2002, p.81).

We are keenly aware of Northumbria University's wider objectives in helping our students prepare for the international and global market. Further, we are anxious to inculcate the wider notion of being a 'global citizen' amongst the student body, providing them with authentic international experiences and making an international element a central tenet of our wider pedagogical philosophy for emergent teachers. We have realised that, by providing a context of wider European and associated cultural awareness, and embedding such elements into our

programmes, we can enable our students to be better placed as European and global citizens, as they approach the job market at the conclusion of their degree studies. Such an awareness and actual experiences can also enable students to critically reflect on their emerging pedagogies through the possession of wider and differing perspectives upon their own cultures and identities. The 'global' and 'national' modes of education might seem to be mutually exclusive and Crossley acknowledges the consequences of power and influence moving away from local communities towards a more global context. However, he reiterates that the opposite is also true, and that *'globalisation not only pulls upwards, it pushes downwards, creating new pressures for local autonomy' [and that] 'national and local cultures . . . play a significant role in mediating global influences'* (Crossley, 2002, p.82).

Current practice

At Northumbria University, the Division of Education is in a very good position to develop international partnerships. As Oxfam maintains, *'The lives of children and young people are increasingly shaped by what happens in other parts of the world'* (Oxfam, 2006, p.1). At Northumbria, not only do our students develop academic expertise in their BA (Hons) QTS degree, but this route also offers qualified teacher status so that student learning is oriented towards a subsequent professional role in teaching, and thus enables them to have a huge impact in enhancing education for global citizenship.

Currently we have a number of thriving partnerships with European Institutions, for example with Oslo University College in Norway, Malmo University in Sweden, VIA University in Silkeborg, Denmark, and Stenden University in Meppel, Holland. Our partnerships enable us to have frequent student 'exchanges' where students from our own and the above institutions visit each other for varying periods, of between one academic term to a whole academic year. This, of course, depends on a 'best fit' model where placement exchanges are tailored to the requirements of the particular student or groups of students (e.g. whether they will make the visit in years 1, 2 or 3, what aspects of the curriculum they will contribute to, or participate in, or what school context they will be placed in, whether primary, middle or secondary). Funding for different projects derives principally from the EU Comenius funding stream. In addition, ERASMUS funding has enabled the School of Education to provide several three month student exchange projects.

In the past ten years, tutors at Northumbria have worked actively to foster and develop our partnerships with European institutions mentioned above. Networking has enabled us to continue current collaborations and to develop future links and collaborative projects. For example, a colleague from Oslo University has worked with us on a drama and art project with students and nursery age children in Newcastle and Oslo, have written articles together and we have presented ideas at international conferences (e.g. ETEN, 2007, Porto, Malmo, 2008). We have been part of three Comenius funded projects with partner institutions, broadly focused on democracy in primary schools and conflict resolution in primary schools, culminating in developing the concept of 'children as researchers' in primary schools. Northumbria University is also a partner institution in an Intensive Programme (IP) with four European institutions, which

is exploring issues around 'transition' from early years to primary education. We are also partners in a new IP with four other European institutions which will focus upon the teaching of English as a foreign language through music and drama. Both IPs involve both students and staff. Staff teaching and practice has been influenced and developed through such collaborations and enables staff to enrich their personal experiences and pedagogies by consistent reflection and through a sense of new challenges and partnerships.

Our findings from the feedback provided by students who have made extended visits abroad as part of their course are very positive, primarily because of the impact upon their individual and collective awareness of a wider cultural, social and political context. As Crossley (2002, p.84) notes, issues of context, are '*perhaps the most enduring characteristic of disciplined comparative and international research in education.*' However, a problem remaining for the Division of Education is how to extend such experiences across the wider student population. By designing an international strand into the second year of their course we are attempting to extend the European experience by giving all students opportunities to study with visiting tutors with different, often innovative, ideas and perspectives about curricular and pedagogical issues.

What we are doing

In May of each year we organise a conference week for our students in years 1 and 2 of the BA (Hons) QTS course in primary education, so that they may reflect upon experiences gained throughout the preceding academic year and to enable them to be taught by a range of tutors from overseas, predominantly from European Universities with whom we have established a partnership over the past ten years or so. The funding for this international strand is mainly sourced through existing Teacher Mobility agreements but is also based on the good will of visiting tutors.

The international strand comprises timetabled sessions lasting across the course of a week. A programme is drawn up when we know who will be visiting us, and will be based upon visiting tutors delivering from their own area of expertise and pedagogic philosophy. Many of the sessions are based from within the existing ETEN (European Teacher Education Network) Thematic Interest Groups, for example, in the arts of storytelling, literature and drama, or from the perspective of a pedagogic philosophy like that of Reggio Emilia in Italy. All of the visiting tutor sessions are designed to complement the students' own curricular experiences of years 1 and 2 in the core and foundation subjects. This enables links to be made between students learning about specific areas of the curriculum at university and their teaching practice in a range of schools and age ranges, varying from foundation and primary stages through to secondary stages at KS4 and beyond. Consequently, as a direct result of the international week, informal visits have been arranged with visiting European tutors and groups of students. For example, a group of mature students took the opportunity offered to them by a visiting Danish tutor to combine a week's holiday in Copenhagen and several visits to Danish kindergartens with which he had close links.

The Oxfam guide for global citizenship emphasises that the scope for education extends beyond any one subject or scheme of work, but

“is relevant to all areas of the curriculum, all abilities and age ranges. Ideally it encompasses the whole school – for it is a perspective on the world shared within an institution, and is explicit not only in what is taught and learned in the classroom, but in the school’s ethos.” (Oxfam, 2006, p.2)

Conclusion

As the academic language of communication across Europe is English this gives us a huge advantage and key position of being able to contribute to educational debates in Europe and guarantees us a wider audience. For example, at a recent seminar held at the Oslo Museum of Industry, Mike Jarvis gave a presentation about how schools can make links with museums and galleries to facilitate creative arts work and was interested to find that a marginalisation of arts practice was occurring in Norwegian schools in the same way as it is within the English National Curriculum. These sorts of similarities across partnerships provide opportunities for collaborative practice. In addition to other examples, we have recently had a request for one Northumbria tutor to be a member of the supervision team of a Danish PhD colleague, based in Oslo University.

What has been especially gratifying over the past five years is to see how each of our partner institutions has followed the example of our international strand and established a similar series of international weeks across the year in which we at Northumbria have been invited to visit, lecture and give workshops. For example, there are similar international weeks hosted by universities in Silkeborg, Oslo and Meppel at various times of the academic year.

At each of these events new partnerships and collaborations are established and planned with an extensive range of academic staff from across Europe (e.g. Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, Sweden, Germany, Spain and Italy) as well as from Great Britain. As Stromquist (2002, p.87) argues it is clear that

“we are seeing a veritable economic and technological and, thus, cultural revolution that is simultaneously affecting values, institutions, practice and futures.”

Furthermore, that

“the new forms of economic activity and economic ‘growth’, the new manifestations of cultural and ethnic identity, the emerging forms of citizenship and civic attitudes, the growing gaps across generations in values, experiences and preferred futures must be systematically reviewed and assessed.” (Stromquist, 2002, p.91)

We argue that the academy and school must be at the centre of such a systematic and constant reappraisal.

References

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